

Genezir House
3 mi. beyond "Henry's Grove"
Worcester County
Maryland

HABS MD-330

HABS

MD.

24. DEPL.V

2.

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Baltimore District

ACD 11. 34
FOLIO 13...

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office

Genesar (Genezir)
State Route 611
Berlin Vicinity
Worcester County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-330

Addendum to
Genizir House
3 miles beyond "Henry's Grove"
Worcester County
Maryland

HABS
MD,
24-BERLV,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO

GENESAR (GENEZIR)

HABS No. MD-330

HABS
MD
24-BERL.V,
2-

Location: State Route 611, Berlin Vicinity, Worcester County, Maryland.

Present Owner Donald F. Humphrey
Silver Spring, Maryland

Present Occupant: Unoccupied as of the winter of 1980.

Significance Genesar was noted, at one time, to have perhaps the finest example of glazed brickwork in the state of Maryland. Until it was vandalized in 1941, it also contained some of the finest transitional colonial paneling in the state.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Unknown. The house is said to have been built by Major John Purcell in or about 1732. (See Forman, Henry C. Tidewater Maryland Architecture and Gardens, p.4).
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title. Reference is to the Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis.
 - 1676 Land patent of 2,200 acres granted to Col. William Stevens, land deputy for the Eastern Shore under Lord Baltimore. Stevens was a large landholder who resided at a plantation named Rehobeth, located near Rehobeth, Delaware.
 - 1679 Deed dated January 10, 1679, Liber MA 3 Folio 541 1678-1688.
Col. William Stevens
To
Edward Wale and Charles Ratcliffe.
 - 1681 Deed dated February 16, 1681, Liber MA 3 Folio 541 1678-1688.
Wale and Ratcliffe divide the property into two equal parts of 1100 acres.
The Ratcliffe property is the property upon which Genesar will be built.
 - 1696 Will, Liber 7 Folio 152 1696, "my plantation where I now dwell with 700 acres of land"
Charles Ratcliffe
To
Charles Ratcliffe (eldest son)

GENESAR
HABS No. MD-330 (2)

- 1709 Will Liber 12, Folio 238A, "600 acres of land where I
now dwell called and known by the name Genesar".
Charles Ratcliffe
To
Elizabeth Ratcliffe (daughter).

Elizabeth Ratcliffe married John Purnell in 1719.
- 1721 Deed, May 20, 1721, Liber GH 7 Folio 7 1721-1725.
Elizabeth Purnell (nee Ratcliffe) and John Purnell
To
Thomas and Mary Purnell
- 1722 Deed, Liber GH 7 Folio 7.
Thomas and Mary Purnell
To
John and Elizabeth Purnell
For £155 and 3,040 pounds of tobacco.
- 1754 Will, Liber D Folio 29 and 407 1754.
John Purnell
To
Zadock Purnell (son) on condition that if Zadock left
no heirs the property would revert to his other sons
William and Thomas.
- Date Will, Liber MH 27 Microfilm Folio 339.
Unknown Zadock Purnell
To
Sally M. Spence (daughter) for life and after her
death to his grandson Zadock Spence.
- 1867 Deed, Liber GHR or GAR 3 Folio 101
Zadock declared a lunatic. All inherited property was
sold to Zadock P. Henry, by Zadock Spence's court
appointed guardian.
- 1939 Sale of property to the Larmer Corporation.
- 1966 Sale of property
Larmer Corporation
To
Donald F. Humphrey

3. Original plans and construction: Genesar is a two and one-half story brick building, with a steeply pitched A framed roof covered with wooden shingles. Below the front eave is a finely decorated cornice. There is a single remaining dormer on the rear of the roof, and indications of former dormers now gone. The interior of the present building was laid out on a center hall plan with one large room on each side. The second and third floors follow the same plan. During the nineteenth century two small additions were added for kitchen and connecting wing. These were removed sometime between 1936 and 1980.

4. Condition of fabric: The house has been deteriorating steadily. In 1941, vandals looted the unoccupied house, stripping the interior paneling. The condition of the house from 1958 until 1980, is well documented in the HABS photographs and measured drawings which accompany this data.

B. Historical Context:

There have been many different spellings of the historic name "Genesar"; natives of the area insist on Genezir but other alternatives include Genezar, Genessar and Genezer. Tradition ascribes the derivation of the name "Genesar" from the Douay version of the Bible, in the book of St. Matthew 14:34: " And crossing over they came to the land of Genesar...". Tradition also names John Purnell as the builder of Genesar. Purnell acquired the property through marriage to Elizabeth Ratcliffe whose father lived and worked on the property. The owners of Genesar, the Ratcliffe, Spence, Purnell and Henry families all played an important role in the settling and developing of Somerset and Worchester counties. Zadock Purnell was authorized by the Council of State to build a battery on Sinepuxent to repel a possible British attack during the Revolutionary War. A British warship did pass into the Bay through the then existing Sinepuxent Inlet, but whether the ship fired cannon into the walls of Genesar, as local tradition claims, has not been documented. Clyton Purnell, born in 1857, was a longtime member of the Board of the University of Maryland, a civic leader and a Judge.

Genesar is a high, narrow, two-and one-half story building with glazed brick set in diamond shaped parallelograms and chevron brickwork patterns on all facades. Unfortunately the brickwork has been obscured by later applications of stucco.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Genesar was, in plan, decorative brickwork and interior paneling, a noteworthy example of Tidewater Maryland architecture of the early eighteenth century.
2. Condition of fabric: Considerably deteriorated.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two and one-half story house measures 45'x19', and has a rectangular plan.
2. Foundations: The foundations are of brick to 27" below grade.

3. Wall construction: The exterior walls are of brick, partially covered with stucco which was scored to simulate ashlar. There are various patterns in the brickwork:
 - a. The south southwest end wall has a diamond pattern of glazed headers.
 - b. The north northwest end wall is patterned in Flemish bond with glazed headers and a chevron pattern in the gable.
 - c. The east northeast wall has a diamond pattern of glazed headers.
 - d. The west southwest wall is laid in English bond with every fifth course an all-header course.
4. Structural system, framing: Brick bearing walls, 17" thick at the first floor level and 13" at the second; interior wooden framing.
5. Chimneys: There are two brick end chimneys.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: One exterior doorway in the main facade leads into the central hall; evidence exists that there was a companion doorway to the right in what is now a window opening. On the rear facade a single doorway leads into the central hall, there is evidence that a doorway opposite that on the main facade lead into the south room.
 - b. Windows: There are three windows, approximately 41"x6', on main and rear elevations of the first floor. Evidence indicates that two of these were originally doorways, later altered to windows.

The brick openings on the second floor main and rear facades are approximately 43"x65" Those on the end wall are approximately 16"x32" and 26"x51". All remaining window frames are of walnut (mortise and tenon with wooden pins) and indicate that all the windows were double hung wooden sash windows.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof is a gable with slopes of 51°, covered in wooden shingles.
 - b. Cornice: There are remains of a simple box cornice with crown molding where it meets the fascia on the rear elevation. The cornice on the main elevation
 - c. Dormers: There is one remaining dormer on the rear slope of the gable roof; it is of frame with a gable roof covered with wooden shingles.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: Both first, second, and attic floors have central hall plans with one room on either side of the hall.
2. Stairways: The main stairway to the second floor has two risers to a square landing and then a single run with eleven risers. The fittings for the balusters are still extant and indicate that there were three rectangular balusters per tread.

The stairway from the second floor to the attic has two risers to a square landing and then a single run of ten risers.

3. Floors: The floors are of yellow pine random-width boards. The flooring on the second floor is generally intact; the joists of the northern rooms are hand-hewn timbers and those of the southern rooms are hand-sawn.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings were plaster on brickbearing walls, and on hand-split lathe which are held in place on oak or chestnut split stud frame interior walls by nailed blocks. Evidence indicates that the plaster ceilings are later additions. There was wooden paneling on almost all the walls which was removed by vandals in 1941.
5. Doorways and doors: No interior doors remain.
6. Decorative features and trim: Interior wooden paneling was removed by vandals in 1941. Some of the chair rail in the second floor rooms remains.
7. Heating: There are two end chimneys. There are two fireplaces on the first and second floors (one in each room). The attic has no fireplace. The fireplaces are of brick partially covered with plaster.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house sits in the middle of a flat, cultivated field, and faces east-northeast.
2. Outbuildings: All demolished.

Prepared by Eleni Silverman
Historian, HABS
April 3, 1984

From field reports by
Donald Humphrey (Owner)
August 25, 1968

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary and unpublished sources:

Maryland Hall of Records, Wills, Accounts and Deeds, Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

B. Secondary and published sources:

Forman, H. C. Old Buildings, Gardens and Furniture in Tidewater Maryland.

Forman, H. C. Tidewater Maryland Architecture and Gardens. New York: Bonanza Books, 1955, pp.3-11.

Maryland Historic Magazine, Vol. 50. No. 1.

Writer's Program, Work Projects Administration. Maryland, A Guide to the Old Line State. New York: Oxford University Press, 1940, pp.3-11.